

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

27 April 1954

DRAFT MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Probable Consequences in France of the Fall of Dien Bien Phu

1. We believe that the fall of Dien Bien Phu alone would not cause the collapse of the Laniel government or a radical change in French policy in Indo-China so long as the Geneva Conference offers some prospect of a settlement in Indo-China. However, it would reduce the willingness of the Laniel government to continue the war. To French public and parliamentary opinion this military defeat would represent the failure of the Navarre Plan. It would strengthen the French belief that France cannot win in Indo-China, and it would increase parliamentary pressure upon the French government to reach an Indo-China settlement at Geneva. It would also reduce support for US policies in France, particularly if the Laniel government in its explanation of the military defeat should emphasize US refusal to provide air support for Dien Bien Phu and if the US stand at Geneva should appear intractable to the French.

2. Following the fall of Dien Bien Phu, we believe that the French government would announce that it was sending additional forces from France to Indochina, but that this announcement would be designed

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primarily to impress the Communist states at Geneva with French resolution. However, we do not believe that the Laniel government would agree to the internationalization of the conflict in Indo-China, unless the Communists refused to negotiate an "honorable" settlement and insisted upon immediate French withdrawal from Indo-China.

3. The French people and government have concentrated their hopes upon Geneva for a settlement in Indo-China. They have almost certainly abandoned hope for a settlement involving US recognition of Communist China, Communist Chinese admission to the UN, or the threat of US involvement to force the cessation of hostilities. The failure of these hopes and the fall of Dien Bien Phu might impel the Laniel government to press for US-UK approval of an Indo-China settlement based upon a partition of Indo-China or a cease-fire which would prefigure such a partition.

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